

## [Silas W. Wilson]

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Range-lore

Ruby Mosley

San Angelo

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RANGE-LORE

Silas W. Wilson was born in Missouri in 1866, a descendent of the Cherokee tribe, his mother being one half Cherokee Indian. The mother's brother lived in the Territory and insisted that they move where the mother could put in her claim and receive the allotment of free land. The move was made; however the mother died before the land was allotted and the children received their share.

"I have lived in the Territory and later Oklahoma practically all of my life," says Silas W. Wilson of San Angelo, Texas.

"My boys live in Oklahoma and would not live elsewhere, but circumstances sent me from there.

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"There was a little war that existed among the Indians; the progressive and national party; the progressives were welcoming the whites and leasing land to them; the nationalists were rejecting and refusing to deal with the whites in any manner.

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"Stealing was the most common crime among the Indians; to steal a hog or horse was considered almost as serious as a murder of the human race. The guilty party was carried out to the whipping post or presented to the Ball Knobbers who carried them out with a paper tag pinned to their heart where they were used for target practice.

"The Indian laws and penalties were: first offense of stealing was fastened to the whipping post and given 49 lashes with the hickory stick; the second offence was 99 lashes; the third offense was death. There in where the hickory stick became famous; the young white hickory of about two years growth could be bent and twisted somewhat as a blacksnake whip and that was the famous hickory stick of the long ago first in use by the Indians.

"Horace Allen, a Texan, moved to the Territory and was my neighbor for some time and I knew he was a good fellow. Outlaws broke into the Territory and killed some of the Indians' hogs. The party that had refused to accept the whites told the Indians that Horace Allen killed their hogs. Of course the Indians became furious and mutilated his body at once; he was not given a chance for trial. I was with the United States Deputy Marshals when the Indians were captured. One of the mutilators had Horace Allen's eyeball in his pocket and displayed it among his friends. We captured thirteen Indians that were sentenced to the penitentiary where twelve of that gang died.

"I saw one Indian get his 99 lashes with the hickory stick. His first offense was stealing hogs and the second was plotting with the white thieves. When the Indian was released from the whipping post he started down the road with blood splashing in his shoes. He struggled about three fourths of a mile, when he fell dead. I have seen many Indians whipped and shot to death for the repetition of what we would call minor offenses.

"The squaw ranked first in managing and providing for the family. She planted, cultivated and harvested the crops; then she made the grain into flour or meal which was made into

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bread. The braves did whatever they enjoyed doing; as hunting or fishing for the meat supply. The braves would gang up and go on hunts for pleasure as well as for the meat value. The meat was brought in and turned over to the squaws to be prepared as best they could. The braves would not exert their physical bodies to make a living for their families; they reserved their strength to take part in any war-like affair.

"When we lived in Atoka County, Lane, Oklahoma, the fourth of July, 1910 was celebrated by all whites far and near. The picnic had been enjoyed all day, good home cooking was served, stands of confections dotted the park here and there, contests and games provided the day's amusement. In the center of the 4 park a pavilion was built for dancing. Every thing was going well, the orchestra was tuning up for a long session of music for the gay affair. The Indians had appeared once or twice during the day; we thought they were just curious to know what was going on. We lighted the oil lanterns as darkness appeared. Twenty-seven Indians rode up and circled around and around our picnic grounds, shot the lights out, gave war-whoops and we knew they meant business and were well on the war path. The crowd disappeared in various ways. Some fainted and were carried out. My wife and I were in charge of the celebration and could not leave. The Indians with guns , knives and various means of protection entered the grounds. About seventeen of them jumped on me at the same time but were outwitted by the help of my wife and their physical awkwardness. My wife hooked an Indian in the back with a hatchet, he took it from her, then snatched her long tresses and slung her to the ground. I saw them strike matches to see where to shoot but we came out on top. We killed several Indians and were assessed small fines, but were glad to get out alive. The remaining Indians were carried to jail. The next day we found four knives and two six-shooters that were lost by the Indians during the affray.

"I was an officer most of the time when I lived in Oklahoma, served as a detective or United States Deputy. I escaped and came to Texas in 1913 to evade leadership of the shooting crew, that is, to shoot all Indians that were given a death sentence. When

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I refused they would have killed me had I not left out. The 5 shooting crew consists of twelve men that did the whipping and killing of the criminals.

“[Phoshopha?] Dances were given when an Indian was real sick. The affair was as elaborate as his social standing would permit as it is today with the celebrities elaborating to the fullest extent while the common person's life and death does not effect the public.

“Phoshopha- is corn meal (as they pounded with mallets) boiled with meat. I attended a phoshopha dance when a chief was sick. About 15 hogs were killed and cut up into large wash kettles. The corn was mashed and cooked with the hog meat to serve about 300 attendants. A big fire was built where the queen of the dance and five masculine selects jumped the leaping blazes to open the dance. The entire group of attendants formed a line and jumped the fire one at a time. In case one refused to jump that one was not permitted entrance. The queen's dance was followed by all dancers. A big chief stood near and sang yello hoy, yello hoy, during the entire time of the dance where all dancers sang and danced to the music. The gay affair or death dance lasted until the sick person died or recovered.

“The courtship and matrimonial responsibilities of the Indians prove to be quite a contrast with ours, in many respects. The old men marry the young girls and the young men marry the old squaws. When an old man is seen riding circles around the teepee of a young maiden, she is assured he is after her. The father sends the daughter out and she goes with the old man to his home where she is 6 on trial for six months. If he proves to be a good worker and provides for him, the legal matrimonial ceremony is performed. If she does not please him, she is then returned to her parents.

“The matrimonial group ceremonies were performed at special protracted meetings about four times each year. Some meetings lasted about one month where many life-long unions were made. When mistreatment of any kind occurred, the whipping post or death was

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the punishment. The young boy married the old squaw, when the old squaw died he then could choose the young maiden for his wife.

“The city and county of Atoka, were named for an old chief, Atoka, who is buried in that county. I observed his grave last summer that still has the little square stone house over the head of it. The common class built log houses over their dead. The funeral attendants dropped coins in the caskets as they paid their last respects to the dead; the money was supposed to be used to pay the fair across the River of Jordan. I knew an old brave that had five hundred dollars in gold; the old Indian custom was carried out by placing the amount into the casket and it was buried with him. Two sons-in-law that survived, remembered the gold, in later years went to the grave and obtained the valuables. Soon their ranches were stocked with some fine horses as a result and the boys were never lawfully punished for the disrespectful act.

“Child birth was regarded as a very minor occurrence among the Indians. A band camped in a wooded section near our house and about three hours later when they passed by on horseback the old squaw had a new born papoose strapped to her back. Horseback riding lulled the new baby to sleep, while the new mother bounced along on the rough horse.

“Old Sins Buyenton was my neighbor and I know this to be a fact, that she gave birth to twins at 9:00 o'clock one morning and that very afternoon she put out the family washing. No doctor was used, their endurance was beyond explanation.

“When two fullbloods and I were returning from a hunting trip we saw a horse with supplies from the market on his back, tied to a tree. As we drew near we found an old squaw giving birth to a papoose. We stopped, rendered our midwife services as best we could. When all was well done we finally persuaded her to be carried home in our hack.

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"The expectant mothers always carried their cradles to market or wherever they went, ready to strap the papoose on their back in case it arrived when they were away from home.

"The physical make-up of a fullblood is quite different from the mix-breed. A dose of calomel will kill an Indian as quick as strychnine will kill a dog.

"The Osage Indians captured my aunt and uncle, Ruddie and John Taylor. Aunt Ruddie got away by some means after having been kept a captive for eight years. Uncle John was a gunsmith by trade and worked for them sixteen years before he gained his freedom and escaped at Hillsboro, Texas. He told of eating 8 roast dog, hair, guts and all. Horse and donkey was also a very much liked food of the Indians.

"I once had a rich Indian sweetheart whose parents owned the [McAlister?] coal mine. She invited me to have supper with her before attending a big dance. The main dish for the meal was called squirrel, I ate my fill complimenting each helping. When I had finished my girl friend reminded me that I had been eating pole-cat instead of squirrel. I was so mad I started to walk out on that girl and not take her to the dance, but Indians can't be treated that way very successfully. Any way, that was my last date with her regardless of her money and glamour.

"Bees have always been interesting to me, in fact I still work with them as a hobby. One time I cut a bee tree for old Tubby fullblood, finding the most beautiful honey that was made, but that did not appeal to old Tubby as she took the unripe honey and ate until the milk from the young bee-worms ran down her elbows. That was the queerest old squaw I ever knew. When she went to drive the calves in she would get covered with black seed ticks. That made her happy indeed, because she ate every darn one of those things, monkey style. Tubby fullblood is applied to the non-cultured Indians as the lower class of Mexicans are referred to as greasers.

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"After all is said and done I remain proud of my Indian blood." Range-lore

Ruby Mosley

San Angelo

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

Mr. S. W. Wilson, San Angelo, Texas, interviewed March 21, 1938.